

## Ethnic and educational homogamy in Luxembourg

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Social scientists report a strong tendency among individuals to form family or partnership with individuals possessing similar features, a phenomenon known in sociology as "homogamy". Most often these similarities go along the socio-economic and ethnic lines. Looking at this trend over the past century, initially, spouses were much more likely to form homogamous unions. This tendency has somewhat declined between 1940 and 1960. In other words, there are more families where one of the partners had higher or lower education than the spouse. This tendency started to reverse again in the late 1970s, partners became more similar either by their educational or occupational status. Until now, a majority of the studies confirm this trend across Europe<sup>1</sup>.

What is different today, is that our societies are becoming more ethnically and culturally heterogeneous. This is the result of intensified migration flows, which have brought increasingly diverse groups of people into Europe. It is well-known that Luxembourg has the highest proportion of immigrants – the latest official figure refers to 43.7% (Statec 2009) whereas the average for the 27 European Union Member States is 6.6% (Eurostat 2008). In this short paper, we first analyse the tendency to live with someone from the same immigrant group (ethnic homogamy), the native population or another immigrant group (both referred to as intermarriage/interpartnership). Second, we look at the degree of living with someone of the same educational background (educational homogamy) in contrast to having a partner with higher or lower education<sup>2</sup>. In both cases, we are interested in the differences across various national groups in Luxembourg. The study draws on the latest available wave of the **Panel Socio-Economique Liewen zu Lëtzebuerg** (PSELL-3, 2008) and comprises 2,554 couples, either married or cohabiting.

### Ethnic homogamy

The left part of the figure shows the nationalities of the respondents who live in Luxembourg and those of their current partners. Luxembourgish and Portuguese appear to be the most homogenous in this regard: 89% and 88% respectively live with persons of the same nationality. In the case of Portuguese respondents, 6% live with Luxembourgish nationals. Partnerships with other nationals are rare for them. This is in line with studies on intermarriages in France, reporting persons of Portuguese origin to have the lowest intermarriage rate<sup>3</sup>.

Other nationals show a significantly lower ethnic homogamy, especially German (40%) and Belgian (44%), and they are also married much more often to Luxembourgish nationals (31% and 30% respectively). It is likely that cultural and linguistic proximity helps to overcome nationality "barriers".

20% of French nationals residing in the Grand Duchy live with a Luxembourgish partner. The explanation to lower occurrence of partnership with native Luxembourgish among Portuguese and French, two largest immigrant groups, might be explained by the availability of a larger "pool" of potential partners of the same ethnicity in Luxembourg, or by geographical proximity to the country of origin, albeit less so for Portuguese. Another possible explanation is the migration of already married couples to Luxembourg.

### Educational homogamy

Looking now at the degree of educational similarities between partners, we check whether the respondents, who are grouped here by their nationality, have partners with the same or higher/lower education than their own<sup>4</sup>. A higher percentage of individuals with the same educational level implies a higher degree of educational homogamy. The figure shows that Luxembourgish nationals have the lowest share of partners with the same education (54%), the remaining 46% of them are equally divided between those whose partner has lower and higher education.

<sup>1</sup> See for example: Ultee & Luijkx (1990), Blossfeld & Timm (1997), Forsé & Chauvel (1995)

<sup>2</sup> Educational level is divided into three categories: "Primary and lower secondary"; "Higher secondary"; and "Tertiary education".

<sup>3</sup> See Safi (2010).

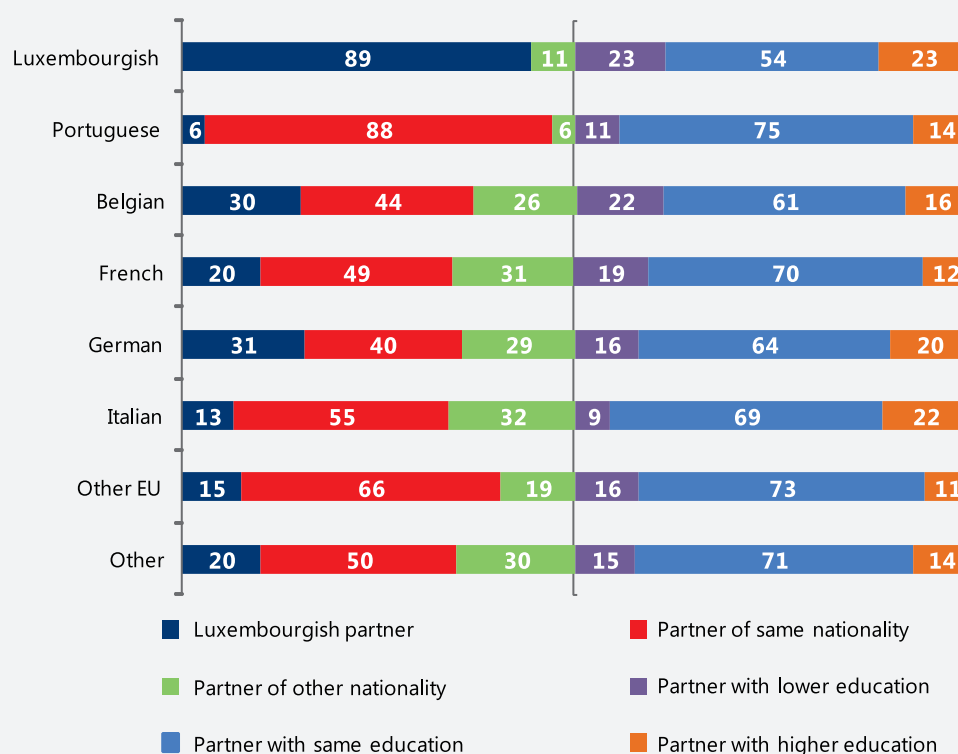
<sup>4</sup> Educational level is divided into three categories: "Primary and lower secondary"; "Higher secondary"; and "Tertiary education".

Portuguese, the second largest group, in contrast to Luxembourg nationals have the highest degree of educational homogamy - 75% of them live with partners who have the same schooling level. French (70%) and Italians (69%) have also quite high figures. By contrast, Belgians and Germans are less likely to live with partners of the same education background: respectively 38% and 36% have higher or lower educated partners.

When interpreting results regarding educational homogamy, the distribution of characteristics such as education in the population groups (by gender and nationality) must be borne in mind. Comparing, for instance, the educational level of Portuguese and Germans living in Luxembourg, we find that 80% of

the Portuguese have only primary or lower secondary education, compared to 17% of the German. As the pool of those with low education is very large among Portuguese in Luxembourg, the probability of having a partner with low education is higher than in those groups where the education is more evenly distributed. The probability of having a partner with lower education then also drops compared to other groups. 57% of Belgians and French living in Luxembourg, for example, have tertiary education. Reversely, for these groups the probability of pairing with someone with higher education than oneself decreases, as a large share attains highest educational degrees. There are also gender differences within ethnic groups which should be studied in more detailed analyses.

**FIGURE 1.** Ethnic homogamy (left panel) and educational homogamy (right panel) by nationality



Source : EU-SILC/PSELL-3, 2008, CEPS/INSTEAD, STATEC

Reading note: Left (red) panel, for instance the third bar: 30% of all Belgian nationals residing in Luxembourg live with a Luxembourgish, while 44% are "homogamous" and live with a co-national. The rest, 26% live with a partner of yet another nationality. Right (blue) panel, for instance the second bar: 3 out of 4 Portuguese (75%) live with a partner who has the same educational level. 11% and 14% cohabit with persons who have lower and higher educational attainments than themselves.

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#### ■ Source de données

Le PSELL-3 (Panel Socio-Economique Liewen zu Lëtzebuerg) est une enquête qui a été lancée en 2003 auprès d'un échantillon représentatif de la population résidant au Luxembourg. Grâce à la méthodologie mise en oeuvre pour sa réalisation, les résultats issus de cette enquête effectuée auprès d'un échantillon initial de quelque 3500 ménages (9500 individus) constituent des estimations précises des chiffres concernant l'ensemble de la population. Le PSELL-3 est réalisé chaque année par le CEPS/INSTEAD, en collaboration avec le STATEC. Il s'inscrit dans le programme statistique EU-SILC de l'Union Européenne (European Union - Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) destiné à connaître les revenus et conditions de vie des personnes et des ménages dans les différents Etats membres.